DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 524 IR 013 049

AUTHOR Kerrigan, Frank; Tilley, Adrian
TITLE Mediated Education: Cue the Quizeratii: 'Blockbusters'.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the International Television Studies Conference (London, England, July 10-12, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Audience Analysis; Content Analysis; Educational Attitudes; Mediation Theory; *Programing (Broadcast); Secondary Education; Skill Development; Social Values; *Student Attitudes; Television Research
IDENTIFIERS *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to record and evaluate, through a questionnaire and discussion, a young audience's perception of a quiz type television program with school age children as participants. The question under investigation was how the fundamental principle of a quiz show--in which knowledge is bartered for material gain--could be measured against or related to the state of education in the mid-1980s in Great Britain. One hundred and fifty young adults between the ages of 14 and 18 were surveyed on the following issues: (1) the context for viewing the program; (2) various levels of involvement according to age and gender; (3) identification with, and empathy elicited by, the program; and (4) audience perceptions of the contestants and the questioning. Analyses of the data indicated that, although the program is clearly popular with this age group, the respondents rejected the power relations and representations of youth offered by the quiz program. It is concluded that the key site for further analysis is the relationship with knowledge and how that relationship is structured, both within the experience of the program and within the students' daily experience of education. (6 references) (CGD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED293524

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Frank Kerrigan and Adrian Tilley

Mediated Education: Cue the Quizeratii: 'Blockbusters'

Paper presented to the 1986 International
Television Studies Conference

IR013049

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Robert Paterson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Mediated Education: Cue the Quizeratii: 'Blockbusters'

The impetus for this paper came initially from school students. Their enthusiasm for the programme 'Blockbusters' was clearly genuine and aroused our curiosity. Why was the programme so popular and what made it so attractive, particularly to children in the 14 - 18 age bracket? Other questions were then prompted. More broadly why had 'youth quizzes' emerged over a period of twelve months as key elements within children's television output? 'Beat the Teacher', 'Masterteam', 'First Class' and 'Blockbusters' now all shared and vied for important young viewerships. How might the fundamental principle of these quizzes - 'barter of knowledge' for material gain - be measured against or related to the state of education in Britain in the mid 1980's? Certainly the language and principles of the market place economy have found a firm purchase within education with the burgeoning forms of vocationalism. Skilling for national economic needs has become the watchword: skills to be attained, measured and certificated in the practical, the literary, the social, the expressive, the cognitive. The education system - through the influence (and in many areas the colonisation) of vocationalism - is more evidently concerned with the reproduction of a set of social relations aimed at preserving the power base of capital and class. Schools are expected to promote the trade of pre-determined skills for future employment by exalting the virtues of the labour market: compliance and competition. Schools thus become the site for the pursuit of the 'relevant' by the adaptable. The parallel between 'Blockbusters' and the education system seemed a forceful one to make.

Yet much remained to be found out about how young people perceived the quiz. Just as in schools there is a wide scale rejection or resistance to the imposition of a set of social values, so then similarly might there be various rejections by young people of the power relations and representations offered by the quiz, 'Blockbusters'. Notions of pleasure, passivity and identification might be a wholly inappropriate way of conceiving the young audiences reception of the programme. Thus the need for some form of audience research, which, given the size of the sample, can only be offered as indicative research.

Let's play .....

'Blockbusters' was scheduled to go out at 5.15 - 5.45 p.m. on four consecutive evenings, networked nationally, a time-slot aimed to capture both the young audience of children's television broadcasting (variously 4.00 - 5.30 p.m.) and the early evening adult viewer, often the parents. The programme was an American import (Mark Goodson and Talbot Television Ltd) where it had been a successful adult quiz show. Central TV, based in Nottingham, had piloted the English version, again with adults, and the pilot had flopped. A decision was made at this stage to make a further pilot series with young people and the programme became much more successful. Such was its success that at this crucial time of early evening viewing (immediately prior to the national news on both BBC and ITV) it was attracting an audience of between 8 and 9 millions and having consequently a significant influence on the viewing figures of programmes both before and after its transmission. The programme, produced and directed by Tony Wolfe, is recorded in Nottingham in front of a live audience in blocks of four programmes per day over a period of six weeks.

The format of the show is essentially a competition between a 'team' of two contestants and a single contestant. The game is played on an electronic board, a seemingly mendatory component of contemporary quiz shows; the team must answer five questions to cross the board horizontally whilst the lone contestant has four questions to link 'blocks' vertically. Such movement can be blocked by the opposition which increases the tension of the game as contestants struggle to complete the line. From this winning move derives the name of the show. The connection with the children's game 'Noughts and Crosses' provides a useful reference point and ensures that the game is quickly understood by its intended audience. The 'Noughts and Crosses' analogy also suggests that it is not so much the format of the game that appeals to the audience because it is not very original in itself, but rather the pace with which the game is played and the entertainment slot into which it snugly fits.

When a winner emerges from a contest ranging over three games, the 'team' or individual has an opportunity to attempt 'the Gold Run'. Here the board is transformed. There are the same number of blocks but each block contains a number of letters which indicate, for example, a phrase, expression or acronym. The' winning contestant must cross the board from left to right covering five blocks within sixty seconds. Cash incentives for correct answers and cummulative prizes for complete 'runs' add to the drama. That 'the Gold Run'is clearly privileged over the rest of the game is emphasised by a change of visual style. It occurs less frequently and has to be 'earned' by winning against the more ordinary board. Contestants seem to be encouraged to recognise that they are privileged to have earned a chance at 'the Gold Run'. They have proved themselves in competition.

'Blockbusters' then occupies a position previously charted by shows such as 'Top of the Form' whilst employing the more slick and tele-professional presentation to be found in the prize shows geared towards adult audiences. 'Top of the Form' involved competition between two school teams and was an extension of the traditional inter-school rivalry played out on week-end playing fields. This effect was enhanced by the public school housemaster role played by the (male) presenter and the accept able cheering allowed for each school's successes. Playing the game correctly, honourably and with good manners were essential requirements for a ritual marked by reverential obeisance to tradition (' ...a Grammar School here for one hundred years ...') and esprit de corps ('... three cheers for...').

'Blockbusters' retains only the barebones of this notion of 'the school' as a structuring element: the contestants' schools are mentioned only in passing, but the emphasis on the sporting nature of the contest remains. It is good, clean fun and contestants are encouraged to shake hands and get to know each other. The competition is not personalised in this sense and the assumption is that there will be no grudges or hard feelings because the game is impersonal and objective. Such objectivity is clearly represented by the board, and therefore individuals win or fail as much because of the whim of the board as because of their opponents' skill. The bonhomie, therefore remains unthreatened. This objective chance element also seems to be one of the attractions of the game. 'Blockbusters', then, capitalises on a traditional quiz-show form but has pared it down somewhat, streamlined the format, to produce a more pacey entertainment to appeal to contemporary young audiences. The crucial components are the presenter, the contestants, the board and the television audience. The studio audience which can be heard is never shown possibly because it would break up the intense intimacy of these principals. The television audience as spectator/participants are led to covet this intimacy and therefore it must not be diminished by any view of the other audience. As in T.V. situation comedies, the off-screen audience provides 'emotion cues' and narrative markers to 'open' and 'close' the episode.

..... BLOCKBUSTERS!

The programme wears the institutional clothes of the game show fashion from the catchy, disco-beat title music (a theme reiterated at 'blockbuster' moments) over the complex credit sequence to the light abundant set and the enthusiastic invisible audience. Pace, personality and pressure are quickly secured through the establishing shot of the studio set, cutting in to the alert and active quiz inquisitor, 'your host' Bob Holness who, with an almost casual assumption of audience knowledge of the rules of the game and a brief summary of the 'state of play' (usually mid-game from the previous episode) launches into the questions. Clearly, here in its pace, he's one of the strengths of 'strip broadcasting', for like the twice-weekly soaps, it needs spend negligible time in restating its situations. The new viewer is carried into the programme by its generic conventionality, by the immediate identification of competitor 'types' and the game structure.

Within the twenty-five minute programme at least one contest will be completed and a second or third will be underway, giving the chance for perhaps two 'Gold Runs'. The programme is likely to be paced so that it exits on a hey point in the contest in order to offer a 'hook' for the audience's return.

Moments of 'relief' from the tension of the game are provided by Bob Holness's brief (and well briefed) interchange with contestants on their personalities, their background and interests. These exchanges are generally question-and-answer on an appropriately informal basis (compared to the formality of individual status in 'University Challenge' or 'Mastermind') with additionally a response or question to a competitor written in by a member of the television audience (for instance '....wants to know how you set your hair into that shape, Jason.'). In this apparent affability and access, the notion that everyone can become a T.V. celebrity for a few minutes seems to be fulfilled.

"THAT'S THE WAY THEY COME": KNOWLEDGE AND FATE

'Blockbusters' operates around an equivocal relationship between Fact and Fate: that knowledge exists independently of consciousness, that it manifests itself arbitrarily and is in turn an arbiter for the human condition. Knowledge here is supported by a fetishistic structure of facts where the endless parade of disparate shards of information legitimates the existence, and ergo, the authority of the 'real world'. In the same way that the rules of the game cannot be questioned, the facts (anchored in language by their initials) cannot be challenged since they emanate from a greater source - reality itself. For the purposes of this game show, the provenance is variously that reality and its surrogate, the board.

In the credit sequence a continuously rolling sheet of what appears to be dictionary or encyclopedia print recedes rapidly towards the horizon line whilst honey-comb shaped blocks move from the horizon towards the camera revolving to reveal severally icons of knowledge which transform on each turn, (among them the Statue of Liberty, Greek gods, Queen Victoria, Beethoven and an armadillo!) A print and image culture are ineffably bound to constitute some invisible machination beyond the horizon, endless 'chimerical facts' offered to audience and competitors alike.

Let us consider the set of questions for one 'Gold Run'. The contestant was expected to recognise these answers from the initials offered 'on the board':

1. Sparring partner
2. Camp Out
3. Hang Over
4. The Indian Mutiny
5. Penny Farthing
6. The Roaring Forties
7. Joseph Conrad
8. Kiss of Life
9. Never-Never Land
10. On the Head
11. Oranges and Lemons
12. Michael Faraday

Of these twelve questions, five (1,2,3,8 and 10) might be regarded as idiomatic phrases, carrying the weight of a consensual understanding, that is to say interpreted as 'common sense' and 'generally accepted' meanings. Such phrases are 'natural' and everyday, they seem to require no interrogation since they emanate from the body of language, English, which represents a particular social, cultural and historical experience. Three questions are historical specific (4,5,12) all relating to moments of English history (the term Indian Mutiny is defined by the English perception of that event). The cultural questions (7,9,10) - two literary, Conrad and J.M. Barrie, one popular culture (the nursery rhyme) remains 'English', Conrad's birthplace excepted. Only one question (6) refers outside the realm of 'English'. In this mono-cultural perspective of 'knowledge' the questions reassemble and resemble the conglomerate of 'facts' and fictions, class and racial prejudices and opinions that have structured school text books and pedagogies through this century.

Significantly, when these 'facts' manifest themselves as questions in the programme, their provenance is apparently Fate, so when Bob Holness delivers a particularly difficult or easy question, he adds apologetically, "That's the way they come". There is no control over them. The Board calls them up and compulsively drives the show on (Bob Holness: "The Board is urging us on"). In similar terms the establishing shot for the Gold Run sequence shows the contestant and the questioner dwarfed by a golden bas-relief engraving of Zeus, a triangulation of competitor, inquisitor and God. Knowledge is here, 'playing, as boys, with flies'. Its authority is underpinned by time - the challenge has to be met within sixty seconds, doubly articulated for the television audience by a digital counter and a clock ticking. The contender now stands within a spotlight on a darkened set and imperceptibly the camera draws closer, ever closer, to the contestant's face as the minute progresses. The power of knowledge, time and the television institution (the slow zoom is a convention across quizzes and news interviews) are conflated in a particularly dramatic form, to act upon human activity and human consciousness rather than be acted upon. The role of the contender within this ritual is Herculean rather than Promethean, passive and defensive rather than active and assertive. With a contestant's failure to meet the challenge, the music mocks, the camera remains in close-up for the reactions of disappointment, frustration and anger. Surveillance and humiliation co-operate in the reinforcement of those power relations which maintain the ineffability of 'knowledge'.

"CAN I HAVE A P, BOB?"

The most powerful figure in holding these relations together is the Presenter, Bob Holness. His role has many functions. He must act as mediator and must communicate the ritual of the quiz to both competitors and the larger audience. This is his most fundamental role - as the point of access into the community of

pleasure that is the quiz. He must never threaten this community, this 'televisual utopia' by mismanagement of its rules or parameters. He is the ever present factor, the constant, the smile on the face of the competition and must fulfil a variety of obligations demanded by the quiz. He must always be 'Uncle Bob' and yet be capable of removing this familial facade when authority is required. He avoids appearing too much the kind of conventional teacher/presenter of 'Top of the Form' often reminding the contestants and audience that he is also a servant of the game. "That is the way (the questions) come ...." he apologises, "They pop those in ....just to surprise you." The anonymous "they" suggesting all the unknown agencies that test and reward students in the various examinations that constitute much of their educational experience.

Holness must constantly construct the programme during the period of its transmission and render its practices, its mode of operation intelligible to the audience. Thus he repeats the name of the show throughout the programme. The enthusiastic invitation, "Let's play 'Blockbusters", often expressed with the hand held out in an expansive, inclusive gesture to the (television) audience as if they are in some way the ever present contestants, is echoed by expressions such as "They come and go like that in Blockbusters" (speaking of a contestant's departure) and the offer of the 'Blockbusters' sweatshirt, the 'Blockbusters' video game, the 'Blockbusters' dictionary. His mastery of the ritual and its incantations and his understanding of its codes - "That's 'Blockbusters'" - proffer the appropriate image of authority upon him, clearly recognised by the audience and the contestants. "A W please, Bob" becomes the recitation of a catechism, but the authority is only partially comparable to that of the teacher with which the contestants are familiar. Pupils see Holness variously in this respect. His dress, his mode of address ("too authoritative, too formal"), the control he maintains ("Calm down"), his constant reminders of the rules, his sense of knowing 'how far to go' in the relationship with contenders, are all perceived as part of a 'teachers' role he adopts. On the other hand he is seen as 'one of the lads' a 'Jeckyll and Hyde', playing a role.

Holness asks the questions but is clearly not the fount of knowledge that teachers appear to be. The knowledge is, in a sense, conferred upon him by his position in the ritual of the game, a position emphasised by the desk-seating of the contestants as opposed to the lectern position occupied by Holness. Whilst he is not the source of all knowledge, that being the game, he must be the unimpeachable judge of the correctness of the answers. This is established by expressions such as "I can't accept that", "We have to be exact" or "terribly strict." Such expressions, often related to almost petty considerations provide the knowledge concerned in the question with an image of preciseness and correctness. Holness as judge remains beyond question because he tantalisingly holds the answer, provided for him by the Game, in front of him on the blue card.

As the only adult on view Holness must negotiate this difficult divide between familiarity and distance, authority and equality, with some skill in order not to provide a target for adolescent resentment of adult control. One method employed for this is the superficial interview with each new contestant, often built upon later if a contestant remains. Thus "Claire Wolvern from Chichester ... give her a round of applause .... and you avowedly admit to being an attention seeker. How do you go about seeking attention?" Following the answer, Holness, eager to get the game going, says, "O.K., having got that out of the way ..." The individual contestant is so placed as subordinate in relation to the Game. The familiarity stops within specific boundaries. The physical intimacy endemic to game-show hosts is clearly unappropriate; it would render Holness's role extremely dubious and

diminish the supposed fair test of knowledge. The lonely isolation of the 'Mastermind' chair is echoed only in the 'Hotspot' of 'the Gold Run' whereas the contestants are seated together at one desk during the regular quiz. This close proximity of contenders, underlined by the distance between them and Holness (they rarely appear in frame together) suggests a less lonely competitiveness and encourages the audience to identify with the contestants rather than feel embarrassed on their behalf or in awe of them. (How effective is this process of prompting identification is the subject of our concerns later in the paper). This distance between 'host' and competitors also provides a symbolic space in which Holness can negotiate the shift between his various roles as and when he considers it appropriate without unnecessary involvement from contestants. The use of symbolic distance to retain authority is clearly a traditional practice of many teachers. The distance also ensures that familiarity will not be construed as favouritism - against which the audience would surely react unfavourably, throwing the incorruptible honesty of the quiz into question and jeapordising the whole structure which Holness strives successfully to maintain.

He must also ensure that the tension, which is at the care of the game, is constantly stressed for both contestants and the audience. Certain points in the game provide Holness with dramatic opportunities: "Could get 'Blickbusters' with this one". "This could be it." "It was all in the balance there" and contestants are drawn in whenever possible so that their tension is highlighted for the viewing audience - thus "I can feel Colin and Jason tensing up over on your left." This continual commentary, analogous to a T.V.sports commentary, emphasises the pace of the quiz and its competitive discourse. Holness will hold the game at those moments where all the dramatic potential can be milked from the situation - particularly that moment when the survival of contestants is down to one answer ... "This has got to be 'Blockbusters' for one side or the other." The pause increases the stress level for the contestants and it is at this point of orchestrated emotion at which membership of the 'Blockbusters' community or club is in jeapordy.

The drama reaches its televisual climax, as has been suggested, in the 'Gold Run' when Holness invites the winner to "Put yourself on the Hotspot!" - an invitation to purgation by the now modified Board. Contestant faces (obliquely on screen) the board. Significantly, Holness is removed from the confrontation, becoming a disembodied voice for the duration since his presence would only detract from the authority of the Board. It is also significant that Holness's removal is paralled by the removal of the losing contestant (off-screen) so that the 'Gold Run' can be seen as a form of diversion from that elimination. It effectively effaces failure - an experience in tests of knowledge which many of the audience will have experienced in their school life. A point of crisis for the 'Blockbusters' community - when an audience might lose its allegiance to or identification with a contestant - is overwhelmed by the shift in intensity of the programme. The 'Gold Run' becomes a point of overdetermination in which incompatible and contradictory discourses are suppressed. It is an act of suppression in which Holness cannot be seen to operate.

It is a suppression by institution (the sudden importation of different codes and conventions), by the structure of the game and by the nature of knowledge itself (represented by the Board). Here is a nice paradigm for the education system which effaces its processes of rejection and failure with ritual (the examination) and displacement (new offers of more intense 'Gold Run' learning). Failure is devolved onto the individual candidate - the notion of Fate makes it bearable.

With the crisis over Holness can be reinstated. Our consent to rejection has been won. The world of 'Blockbusters' survives.

'TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOU...': YOUTH RE-PRESENTED

If the 'image' of the show - the homogeneity of 'systems of entertainment' and 'systems of knowledge' - is to be clearly identified then the image of the contestants must be similarly identifiable and compatible to those determining norms. So contestants are required to be outward going and personable - the idealised televisual 'individual' - and at the same time deferential to the 'system of knowledge' operating within the show. There is no space or place for any challenge to, or questioning of those systems or discourses; thus the minimal time for contestants to speak about themselves, their lives and, significantly, their education.

Kuehn (1976) has suggested that contestants in American quiz shows "adopt show-biz norms", norms that entail 'putting oneself over well' and 'projecting a good image' which will override the desire to win. Simply, that being good on television is more important than being good at quizzes. Certainly 'Blockbusters' would appear to subscribe to that notion of 'good image'. Often contestants are selected and paired on the strength of their visual style: a penchant for colourful T-shirts or outrageous hairstyles which became an on-going personal theme developed by Holness across episodes. 'Odd-bonding' - pairing quite different character types - is a useful ploy in constructing and maintaining 'personality' : Colin wears plain glasses, sports jacket, neatly trimmed hair whilst his partner Jason sports spiked hair with a ribbon on occasions, facial make-up and brightly coloured clothes. To anchor their personalities, contestants are encouraged to instal mascots as personal statements: a pair of crossed drumsticks in one case, diverse and strange furry animals for many. Such artifices add to the ritualistic nature of the contest (leading regularly to the High Altar of the Gold Shot) and significantly reinforce the mystical provenance and primacy of the knowledge: that here is a system which operates, as Fate, upon the hapless individual.

This suggests then that the role of the contestant is determined by constraints and that there is little evidence that the competitor might be an active cultural agent, operating as 'a receiver' rather than 'a transmitter' within the communication network. Yet, in their interviews with Holness, contestants invariably reveal high levels of creativity, with musicality a regular feature ('the County Youth Orchestra') and specialist interests (Claire and the theatre). The potted tele-biographies as honorifics of the qualities of the individual and the diversity of character, suggest in their unanimity of response, a conformity of youth characteristics; an authodoxy which amounts to a range of typicalities: deference ("Please Bob") and obeisance (no-one breaks the rules), and a sense of fair play (opponents make a show of shaking hands at the end of each contest). The values of the 'Blockbusters' system are essentially white and middle class. There are rarely any black contestants and little variation in the contestants' mode of address (not many dropped aitches here). They are, to a person, subscribers to the systems, good television contestants and good consumers of knowledge. 'Blockbusters' in its operation of discourses of entertainment and knowledge, has produced in the arrangement of those discourses and endorsement of the values promulgated by the English education system and the English class system: values which deny young people energy, self-determination and voice and which do not even admit certain representatives (no-one questions or undermines the show's rules by laughing at its conventions and practices or by offering a challenge to Holness's control of the situation).

The social and educational background is virtually absent beyond a reference to the contestants' school and home town. 'School' is used in an undifferentiated way to include comprehensives, sixth form colleges and fee-paying private institutions. The contestants may be ultimately winning prizes for their school as well as themselves, but this is not related to any idea of school needs or interests. The contestants have temporarily joined another 'school' (apparently a mirror refraction of real school) - that of 'Blockbusters'. This school has its liberal teacher. "Can I have a P Bob?" asks the contestant knowingly to enthusiastic laughter from the class/audience. There is an autocratic Headteacher - the Board - which dispenses knowledge and justice dispassionately. The environment is, like

the school library, a continium of symbolic academe. This is a modern school however; the pupils/contestants have buzzers to press for their first response, but retains the old world tradition of raising the hand for the second response. When they leave they are offered iconic tokens of 'the School': the video game, the dictionary, and the surrogate school tie, the 'Blockbusters' sweat shirt.

The 'Blockbusters' school is an attractive one: a strong sense of belonging and social cohesion, of skills tested, of success rewarded. Expulsion here is no dishonour, yet as with real schools, in their terms, failure is the moment and circumstance of social division, the fall from grace. With the effacement of this social and cultural deformation, the introduction and incorporation of a whole new group of young people into 'the knowledge game' is made possible.

'BOFFS AND SMOOTHIES': SOME AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS

We have attempted to record and evaluate audience perceptions of the show amongst fourteen to eighteen year olds through questionnaire and discussion. Our aim was to consider the context for reception, the various levels of involvement, identification and empathy evolved by the programme, and the audience perceptions of the contestants and the inquisitor, Bob Holness. We cannot presume, from a sample of just less than 150, that these results have the status of findings. They are offered primarily as indications of a variety of responses according to age and gender which might be seen to question assumptions about how a programme like 'Blockbusters' is received by a young audience. These responses might suggest resistances to and rejections of the dominant values of the programme. Secondly this work may suggest an alternative approach for media educationalists seeking to raise issues of audience with their students, that the questionnaire format may be a useful guide or springboard to discussion or might be sensibly employed by the students themselves to interrogate patterns of consumption.

'I ALWAYS WATCH IT WITH MY NAN': CONTEXT

The programme 'Blockbusters' is clearly popular with the 14 - 18 age group, 93% having seen the show as against7% with no viewing experience. Of the viewing sample, 15% claim to have watched it once or twice, 42% watch occasionally and 43% are regular viewers, the last figure being a substantial one given that the programme commits its audience to four nights a week and that the youth audience watches less television than any other age group.

Clearly the programme is consumed, as one would expect, largely as a family experience, with only around 25% watching alone, a very small number watching with friends (6.5% among the 16+ age group), 43% watch with brothers and sisters, whilst around 51% watch with their parents. The number of adult viewers bears out audience research figures for children's television and would assert the familial as an important factor within patterns of consumption. Within that viewing context there were far fewer young viewers involved in competing with others in answering the questions of 'Blockbusters' although numbers increased in the older age range (55% among 14 - 15 year olds, 68.5% among 17 - 18 year olds) with girls less likely to compete than boys (50% girls, 65% boys). This gender differentiation might point to the ethos of competition being deemed less important or attractive to and for girls, or that 'Blockbusters' has an evident male cachet (presenter, number of male contestants, the subjects of the questions).

The levels of intensity of viewing increase with age: 50% of 13 - 14 year olds, again with a gender disparity overall (50% female, 63% male). Obviously the age of the contestants (mainly 16+) is a factor in how involved the young audience can become. More generally the act of television consumption is a casual one with many in the audience involved in doing other things (43% of 14 - 15 year olds, 23% of

17 - 18 year olds, 43% female, 52% male). The narratives and constructed dramas of 'Blockbusters' are clearly not as riveting and fascinating as the programme makers deam.

'Blockbusters' would appear to be viewed largely within the 'flow' of television, with very few of the sample watching that programme alone. Age is not surprisingly a factor here, given that 'Blockbusters' appears in the final section of what is the children's programme sector (68.4% of 14 - 15 year olds watch the previous programmes, falling to 51.5% for 17 - 18 year olds). The end of the programme, marking the advent of adult television with the News is a cut-off point for the youth audience (only 43% of 14 - 15 year olds continue to watch, 51.5% of 17 - 18 year olds) with an interesting gender variation: only 20% of females continue to view against 56% males. One would need to address the varying social and work roles within the family over the teatime period to explain this.

Clearly the television genre of quiz shows is popular with the youth audience, 77% of the females and 87% of males watching programmes similar to 'Blockbusters', the variation reflecting the gender differences of engagement in the ethos of competition. Similarly there were marginal variations in the numbers who supported either one contestant or team (60% female, 65% male). In this matter of support, which demands levels of identification and empathy, age was an unimportant factor: only 56% of 14 - 15 year olds were drawn into an affiliation process against 77% of 17 - 18 year olds. If there were any broader involvement in the programme it might be seen in the numbers attempting to answer the questions, where age was a factor: 81.5% of 14 - 15 year olds, 93% at 16 and 97% for 17 - 18 year olds.

How might these assertions be broadly characterised? Age is, not surprisingly a factor in the involvement of audiences in the programme for the simple reasons that older students are presumably more able to answer the questions, have more accessible identity figures in the contestants and are better able to cope with the formal structure and relations of the programme. Gender differences materialise in the distancing of the audience, with females distinctly less involved in the processes of the quiz but equally prepared to answer the questions. (For girls the cognitive element is more attractive than other appeals from within the programme). More importantly, in amongst all this, is evidence of non-involvement and wholescale rejection of the audience positionings offered by the programme: the tendency to only fitfully attend to the television image, the lack of affiliation to contestants, the refusal to 'play 'Blockbusters' by indulging in competition. Moreover, questionnaire responses revealed a general and distinct antipathy to the programme presenter, Holness, and often an alienation of audience from the contestants. In subsequent discussions these audience perceptions were clarified.

The majority (67%) saw Holness's role in the programme primarily as a functional one - to ask questions - in our analysis to work within the system of knowledge. However the second perceived function was an element of the entertainment discourse; 60% considered his second most important role was to tell jokes. Third important was the social role as host and presenter of introducing and settling contestants (54%). Thereafter Holness's tasks were to tell us more about the contestants (social role: 46%) and fifthly (39%) an institutional role of making the programme more dramatic. Clearly the youth audience expectations for the presenter are closely linked to expectations of light entertainment: humour and human interest. The televisual styles, forms and roles seem to have little significance. Many responses suggested that Holness 'talks too much', 'explains the rules too often' and was 'too authoritative', some recognising that his particular oral register was a form of authority, and that even ad libs reinforced the sense that he was in charge. (In any badinage Holness has 'the last word'). Some students suggested that his manner was 'patronising' and few recognised his social skills in handling young people within a very artificial and pressurised context. The fact that he is the sole adult representative in the 'Blockbusters' would tend to lead to ageist expressions:

that he was physically 'not attractive' because of his age, that he was 'acting a right plonker.' It would be neither unkind nor unfair to assert that, for the young audience, Holness would appear to be an irritation, the values he represents (order, the adult world, authority) are rejected.

How then do youth audiences perceive their peers as contestants? Discussion centred initially on what the attributes of a 'good contestant' might be. Students enumerated qualities of 'quick thinking', 'being a good loser', 'a sense of humour', 'dress sense' and 'the ability to take pressure'. Particularly notable was the endorsement of the individual, on their own and under pressure, (as in the 'Gold Run'); this ethos of 'gritty individualism' was repeatedly offered as the most generative element within the show. Contradictorally, students then tended to see contestants as 'types' regardless of their individuality: 'boffs', a term applied to those who dressed conventionally and could be judged as academically clever, 'smoothies' for whom visual style and suaveness were key features, and 'normals', an ill-defined conglomerate of the rest. Often contestants were seen as 'snobby' which is used less in the sense of class superiority, rather the manipulation of power: the tendency to 'answer all the questions and not giving the others a chance'. 'Stuck up' and 'weird' were also used almost synonomously for 'snobby' to register negative feelings about contestants. Class differences may be perceived but are not articulated in terms of class. Instead personal qualities and manipulative capacities are cited which gives some idea of how 'Blockbusters' effaces problems of class and perhaps how far students are denied a class analysis of their own experiences and perceptions. Thus surfaces become crucial in their evaluation of contestants: clothes, hair and being 'different' are the key-notes. So while Holness draws attention to what he sees as the signs of rebellion and outrageousness - the soaped, spiky hair - as a possible point of interest and identification for the young audience, he would actually appear to be centring on those facets of the competitor which will distance audience sympathy.

It would seem that the ethos of the individual flourishes only in terms of the structure of the game itself: the individual against 'the team', the individual against the clock, the individual against the Board. Thereafter any expressions of individuality tend to be regarded as unacceptable by the audience. 'Blockbusters' then, with its systems of knowledge and entertainment operates or inveigles a social and cultural orthodoxy, a set of conventionalities which would seem to hold the youth audience in paradox. The social relations within the programme are rejected on the whole, the ways in which youth is re-presented to them are rejected. What is asserted, and what must be seen as the key site for further analysis, is the relationship with knowledge and how that relationship is structured, both within the experience of the programme and within students' daily experience of education. The drive to know is fundamental. How it is controlled and inhibited (as in 'Blockbusters' and in our school system generally), how access to knowing (as opposed to knowledge) is denied, must continue to be our concern, lest all learning becomes merely reproductive of the existing power relations in society. Lest learning becomes further reduced to economic functionalism, trading knowledge for passivity, wherein school's main function is to cue the quizeratii.

READING

Dyer, Richard	'Light Entertainment' TV Monograph No. 2 B.F.I 1973
Kuehn, LL	'The Only Game in Town' Pacific Sociological Review Vol. 19 No. 3 Pages 385 - 400 1976
Masterman, L	'Teaching the Media' Comedia 1985
Mills, A & Rice, P	'Quizzing the Popular' Screen Education No. 41 Winter/Spring 1982
O'Connor, M	'Knowledge, Ideology and Television Quiz Shows' Unpublished M.A. dissertation, Institute of Education London University 1983
Tullock, J	'T.V. Quiz Shows and the Concept of Knowledge' Screen Education. Summer 1976